

A RINGERS YEAR

APRIL 2022: Another one of my trainees has just been granted their C ringing permit by the British Trust for Ornithology. I now have two active ringers locally who are able to do some of their own ringing and also collaborate with me on ongoing projects. Depending on both time and aptitude it generally takes a minimum of three years to get to this level. My C ringers have helped a great deal recently because April is when Tawny Owls start nesting (*yes I realise media Natural History reports always tell you about those that are found with young in February etc. but that is not usual and especially not in North Northumberland*). They are quickly followed by our unique English colony of Goldeneye ducks. In recent years we have put a lot of effort into the Goldeneye because of the need to fit and retrieve the Geo-loggers from them to research their movements outside the breeding season. This particular research is now at the dissemination stage and I have now done several talks about their fascinating travels. These two unrelated species do associate together because of needing similar nest sites. Locally this means that if three 'tawny-duck boxes' are put up in a wood in close proximity then the owl will choose its preferred nest site first and the ducks will take the other two. It seems likely that the goldeneye derives some protection from this arrangement from Stoats and other predators. At the time of writing, we are still finding nesting Goldeneye with three re-traps located so far (FH92086) with 14 eggs first ringed in 2021; and (FH92089) with 12 eggs also located in 2021; and (FH92088) with 8 eggs also from 2021. Another brand new female has 8 eggs. A further 8 females appear to be laying eggs (one every day or other day) until they start incubating for a month.



Returning to the Tawny Owls, most have been incubating for a month and their young are starting to hatch. They always seem to grow faster than Barn Owls and are certainly more animated and adventurous at an earlier stage. While a young Barn Owl is happy to mostly sleep in its nest box for a month or more, the young Tawny Owlet is quickly looking for ways to escape via the ground or a tree (much the safer route) well before it can actually fly. This 'branching' behaviour may have some evolutionary advantages but it is not such an advantage when well-meaning people find them – pick them up and take to a Vets or animal sanctuary! If you find such a young owl on the ground the best thing to do is to put it back up in the branch of a tree and let its parents find it.

A month or so ago we ringed a new female near Wingates and have now ringed her two young.



Another female refused to come out of her box until we also ringed her three young near Longhorsley (and we discovered she was a retrap from 2019 from the same farm). A brand new box near Longframlington produced another three owlets (although the female eluded us) and a box in 'goldeneye duck territory' produced another three owlets and a brand new female. We still have several tawny owl nests to return to. The picture below is of a very sleepy female ringed near Howick.



This is a much better year for these Tawny Owls after the disaster of 2021, when I monitored only one successful nest. For a simplistic explanation just remember what a horribly late cold spring we had last year.

Meanwhile we have continued to monitor a few other sites using mist-netting principally to ring returning migrants. This produced Chiffchaff back in March but it was not until April that the Willow Warblers started to arrive. These birds will start nesting around the middle of May; just behind our resident tits etc.



We will start to monitor the success of this year Barn Owls towards the end of May and it would be really helpful to receive reports of owl sightings around buildings and trees were they just might be nesting. After the winter storms many natural and artificial sites have been lost so some will be in new sites.

Best Regards

Phil Hanmer

S Ringer/Trainer; Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum).

E-mail: tytoalbas@btinternet.com

